Parliamentary Reformation:

EXAMINED

UNDER THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES:

EXTENDING the RIGHT of ELECTION.
ABOLITION of BOROUGHS.

QUALIFICATION of MEMBERS.
ABRIDGING the DURATION of PARLIAMENT.

WITH A

DISSERTATION on MINISTERIAL INFLUENCE.

PROVED BY

ANECDOTES AND MINISTERIAL LETTERS.

BY JOSEPH WILLIAMS, ESQ.

——— Si quid novisti rectius istis
Candidus imperti, si non, his utere mecum.

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TO THE PUBLIC.

AS I never worſhipped the Idol of Power, ſo I never liſted myſelf in the train of Oppoſition. Had I been inclined to either, I muſt have been diſappointed. To have looked up to Power, I muſt have looked up to the King; but bleſs his Majeſty! he has ſo little power, Perſonally or Politically, that I know ſome about the Royal Perſon have more reaſon to complain, than many Great Men's followers——To have joined Oppoſition would have puzzled me more; inſomuch that it would be difficult to diſtinguiſh between faction of miniſters, faction of Parties, or confuſion of all. It will not then ſurprize, that in keeping clear of all, I have adhered to the principle of an Engliſhman, in pointing out truths, however ſevere; and in maintaining liberty of ſentiment to be the free independent uncontroulable bulwark of our boaſted Conſtitution. I once had an ambition of becoming a member of that ſenate, which uncorrupt, would be the glory of the world. I had vanity to think my integrity would have borne me through with honour; at leaſt, I would have ſhown a negative virtue to have remained no longer there, than I found myſelf capable of rendering ſervice to my country; in which ſenſe the firſt attention would have been, to have cleared the rays of Majeſty from the clouds and fogs of the political atmoſphere; whether ſecret influence or miniſterial ſhackles—the firſt ſtep of reforming the Conſtitution.

PARLIAMENTARY REFORMATION.

REPRESENTATION in Parliament has been ſo much the ſubject of Political diſquiſition of late, that I am induced to offer my ſentiments to the public, with the hopes that ſome idea may ſtart, which will aſſiſt the endeavours of thoſe who have it more in their power to work the Reformation ſo loudly called for.

Grotius, Puffendorf, and Monteſquieu, in their writings, with many others, have ſo fully explained the principles of Natural and Political Liberty, as well as ſyſtems of Legiſlation, with the origin and forms of Government, that very little room is left to expatiate on the general principle.

The conſtitution of Great-Britain was univerſally allowed to come as near to perfection in its theory, as well as practice, as human laws could frame it; formed of all the compounded parts which raiſed the Moſaic, Grecian, and Roman Governments to ſo much grandeur; cemented with the philoſophy of ancient wiſdom, and improved

proved by modern refinement. Such was the principle and groundwork of the conſtitution of this country, freed from the ſuperſtition and ceremonials that ſhackled ancient government in the execution. No wonder then, that this empire ſhould be the admiration of Foreigners! the boaſt and pride of Engliſhmen!

Under ſuch a deſcription, could it be imagined, that a fermentation, ariſing from the nature of perfection, ſhould cauſe an inward corruption to bring about its own diſſolution; and that, diſeaſe is bred within itſelf to haſten its end. Such is the caſe with all natural bodies, human, animal, and vegetable. Nature has given to them a ſtate of improvement, perfection, and decline—inevitable, immutable, and their periods of duration are limited. In bodies politic, from the downfal of the greateſt empires, we muſt ſuppoſe that a fatality preſides, and fixes the reſolutions of men to certain unknown principles, and unaccountable actions, contrary to their intereſts and inclinations: which proves bad miniſters to be inſtruments of a power that operates to its own end, and makes the adage good;

Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.

Repreſentation has ſuch an idea of ſuperior merit, in its appointment, that we might ſuppoſe it cloathed in a coat of adamant, repelling every attack from the influence of the crown, or evil efforts of deſigning men; yet, extraordinary as it appears, we find, that in this period of dark, unaccountable politics, there have been attempts made by popular orators to burſt the conſtitution, and blow it up; when, at the ſame time, every engine of tyrannic power was at work to unlink the chain of government; miniſters and oppoſition purſuing each other with the greateſt rancour; yet one party had not ſpirit to impeach, nor the other to puniſh.

That

That repreſentation in Parliament is corrupt, and wants a reform to preſerve the exiſtence of the conſtitution, no one will diſpute; yet the mode and ſubſtance of the reformation neceſſary, is what I fear neither prudence nor integrity can accompliſh. Miniſters are ſtate phyſicians, who, like ſome other phyſicians, play with the diſtempers they are called upon to cure, in ſuch a manner as may beſt anſwer their own advantage by lucrative emoluments, which can only be attained from a continuance of the Diſeaſe.

Economical Plans in different departments are partial applications, which only heal the ſores to break out in more mortal parts. I ſhall endeavour to probe the complaint to its ſource of evil. I will uſe the language of common ſenſe, a language long exploded from miniſterial uſes. To the abſence of common ſenſe our misfortunes are chiefly owing. Where the repreſentation of parliament is imperfect, or rather abuſed, I ſhall be ſtudious to point out, in the plaineſt language, unſophiſticated with the affectation of learning, or the bias of party opinion.

Repreſentation in parliament is a delegation of power to all acts of legiſlation that regards the conſtitution, laid down in clear conciſe codes, ſecured by *Magna Charta* and Bill of Rights. It poſſeſſes the chief power of taxation, the ſecurity of property, and the maintenance of eſtabliſhed laws. It guards againſt the encroachments of the executive power, which has been entruſted in the hands of one, with the title of King, limited and accountable. Formerly this power was kept within bounds by the ſimpleſt reſerve of Parliament, who never granted aids until the grievances were redreſſed, and the jealouſy of the people removed: every money bill was tacked with ſome bill in favour of the people. This expedient perfectly anſwered the purpoſe: as long as the repreſentatives were virtuous, they with-held the

ſupplies,

ſupplies, until harmony was reſtored between the diſcordant parts of the conſtitution.

But when the pride of power grew gigantick, and the ambition of miniſters found out ways to bribe the repreſentatives with the money of their conſtituents, the prevailing argument of bribery grew general; the ſuffrages of the people were ſoon corrupted; and a total degeneracy pervaded every link of repreſentation, which threw ſuch a weight of influence into miniſterial hands, that little more than the name and ſhadow of Liberty remains. The kingdom has now brought the merits of the conſtitution to an iſſue, on which the laſt ſtake of a ruined deluded people depends. The voice of clamour for a new mode, or more equal repreſentation, is univerſal, the kingdom hopes from any change or innovation ſome cure. The evil certainly exiſts; but the remedy coming from a ſuſpicious quarter of oppoſition, partial to opinions and party zeal; which too often warps the judgment, and prevents the liberal exerciſe of candid enquiry. Connected with no ſet of men, with no miniſter, I voluntarily offer my ſentiments on the occaſion, and will proceed to enter into the examination of the firſt article.

Extending

Extending the RIGHT of ELECTION

TO THE

WHOLE PEOPLE.

THE great point in view is to remove the corruption which has crept into Parliament, ſo that undue influence may have no poſitive power to invade the firſt principle of the conſtitution, by a violation of its moſt ſacred rights; and to return once more the rights of Election from the Repreſentative to the collective body of the People. Common ſenſe, to which I appeal, reprobates the diſtinction of the rights of Election in the People: it took its origin from villanage. The lower claſs of the People contribute largely and chearfully to the taxes impoſed by Government; and they are allowed to have as full a ſhare of the boaſted liberty of an Engliſhman as the greateſt men in the kingdom, and yet are not repreſented in giving their conſent to taxation of their properties. Property does not altogether conſiſt in land, but in what pays a tax: the conſump-

tion of a labourer pays a tax, as does every man employed in trade: they ſubmit to the laws, without giving their aſſent by repreſentation. No one will tell me that this is juſtice!

In the preſent ſyſtem, a life leaſe in a Freehold, or annuity on a Freehold to the amout of forty ſhillings, clear from deductions, has a vote—whereas a leaſe for ninety-nine years, of five hundred pounds a-year, is not admitted the privilege of being repreſented: this abſurdity originates from the feudel tenure; but as vaſſalage does not ſubſiſt in law nor idea, the cuſtom appertaining to what does not exiſt, ſhould certainly be aboliſhed; and a new model ſhould rectify the violent meaſure of former times, by proving, that diſability of repreſentation is no part of the Engliſh conſtitution. The ſelf-created power that excluded the lower claſs of people, were guilty of tyranny and uſurpation, which that time probably might warrant; but which is very inadequate to the enlightened age of liberty that our conſtitution at this period challenges.

If the whole comitia of the people are allowed a repreſentation, the calculation comes within a very narrow compaſs; for example, the calculation of population made by the three moſt ingenious men who have wrote on the ſubject, are as follows:

Captain Grant, in the year 1661, calculated the number of people in England and Wales at ——	6,440,000
Sir William Petty, in the year 1682, to be ——	7,359,000
Mr. King, in the year 1688, to be ——	5,500,520
Suppoſing the medium of the three calculations to be	6,000,000

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I underſtand that the aforeſaid calculation excluded women and children. Allowing the Parliamentary repreſentation to be ſix hundred perſons, which divided will be one member to every ten thouſand electors. I will ſuppoſe the county of Huntingdon, one of the ſmalleſt counties, to contain 10,000; it ſhould return one member only: if a county contained 14,000, it ſhould return but one member; but if it numbered above 15,000, any number between that and 20,000, two members; greater numbers in proportion: any above the five between every ten, ſhould have an additional member. By this means the whole comitia of the people ſhould be repreſented: nor would the difficulty in collecting the ſuffrages be great. Every pariſh by their own veſtry ſhould collect their voices, and the churchwardens produce the returns, ſigned by the parſon and other church officers, at the general meeting of the ſheriff, who would make his return without confuſion, riot, and expence.

On this ſcale, in the language of common ſenſe, would be equal repreſentation; the proportion that Middleſex and the manufacturing counties would return, might be thought too great; but in a commercial country they ſhould have a proportionable weight in the conſtitution. I muſt obſerve, that every man muſt pole in the pariſh he was born; which would leſſen the number of voters, eſpecially in large cities. This Plan would take in the Maſs of the People, whoſe part of Power and Liberty are indiſputable, either collectively or by deputation. It has been a maxim, that Dominion ſhould follow Property. The greateſt property of a country is the people—the maſs of the people, whom Dominion ſhould follow.

If any ſet of men, by aſſociation or general meetings, will take upon them to draw a line of repreſentation ſhort of a general ſcale, it will be an uſurpation. If the houſe of commons take upon them

to

to alter the preſent ſyſtem, their reſolutions, their power, will be ſelf-created. On my plan of extending the right of repreſentation, the ſtreams of corruption will be ſo multiplied as to loſe their effect: It will add popularity to the crown, it will add power to it; in ſo much as it will leſſen the influence of ambitious men, who upon every occaſion are ready to ſacrifice the honour and intereſt of the crown to their own views.

The preſent complaint does not reſt on the diſability of any part of the people from being repreſented; nor does the inequality of repreſentation take them in view. As it is taken up by the preſent reformers, they point more at the inequality of large counties, and of the diſproportion of boroughs, yet they mean the ſame as I do;—that the bribery and corruption of parliament is the chief evil to be removed, which has defeated the intention, and gone great lengths to deſtroy the compact of Government, with that balance neceſſary to be maintained between Liberty and Power.

I may be ſingular in my opinion in thinking—that extending the right of election to all degrees of men, is the juſteſt and moſt feaſible means to reconcile all objections, and fix the government on a laſting baſis; at leaſt to ſuit it to the genius of theſe times; which is very different from what the conſtitution was a century ago. Common ſenſe tells me, that the ſame rule, the ſame power, which erected the number of voters to one hundred thouſand, which is near the calculation of the preſent number, (being only the ſixtieth part of the people), may confine them to half that number, and exclude the yeomanry entirely.

ABOLITION OF BOROUGHS.

IT is a point worthy examination, to conſider the ill effects the Boroughs in general produce to the Conſtitution: the great weight they throw into the miniſterial ſcale, from the nature of the charters and franchiſes which have been beſtowed on the corporate towns, gives a decided advantage againſt the People, is a breach in the conſtitution of ſuch enormity, that it is amazing the Public Indifference has not been arouſed to aſſert the Dignity and Independence of their Rights of Election long ago. What avails the equality of the laws to preſerve Property? if we receive it as a favour, and not as an inviolable right, miniſters would not have triumphed in this advantage at this day notwithſtanding, did not the Family Boroughs, and the Influence of Individuals, join them in the violation of our privileges in this reſpect, and make larger ſtrides to rob us of our political rights, than even the graſping hand of power.

As example has more weight than precept, I will give inſtances. The firſt which occurs to me is the town of Carnarvon. The conſtable of the caſtle is appointed by the Crown: formerly the Burgeſſes, according to their charter, choſe their own mayor and bai-

liffs, and preſented them to the conſtable; but now the conſtable appoints a mayor for them, who makes what burgeſſes he pleaſes: and tho' there are contributary towns who have a right to join as conſtituents in returning a member, yet the influence of the conſtable of the caſtle has been ſo prevalent, that there has been no conteſt againſt his intereſt for a hundred years paſt: this, therefore, in plain language, is a Miniſter's Borough.

There are other Boroughs, the abſolute property of individuals, who ſet them up at public market, and conſider them as part of their eſtates.—A gentleman, who took upon him to return for the borough of Montgomery, paid a compliment to the miniſter, and gave him the opportunity of returning a name to be the member The name of Congreve was ſent down:—when the ſheriff filled up the writ, he was at a loſs for his Chriſtian name. Mr. Congreve did not attend in perſon. With ſome difficulty they found his name was Ralph.

Sir George Warren is returned for the town of Beaumaris a burgeſs in parliament. The number of conſtituents is twenty-four, all at the pleaſure of this burgeſs's ſon-in-law. This burgeſs has the ſame power inveſted in him as ten thouſand men can give to their repreſentative for the city of Weſtminſter.—There are greater inſtances of the violation of Juſt Repreſentation than this.

I contend it would be leſs injurious to the community, if Government had the command of all the boroughs, than if they ſhould be at the diſpoſal of individuals. Miniſters could make uſe of them in the general ſcale, perhaps even to alter the conſtitution; yet every one muſt acknowledge, that one tyrant is more ſufferable than an hundred; and no one can be ignorant of the tyranny practiſed in thoſe boroughs where a little Great Man exerciſes his power:—oppreſſion,

litigation,

litigation, and general feuds, are the bleſſings of his neighbourhood; and it is a certain truth, that the man who will ſell his borough, will ſell himſelf. The moral evil which this occaſions to ſocial happineſs ought to be ſufficient to disfranchize this imperfect mode of repreſentation.

It is not in common ſenſe, it is not in the wiſdom of Legiſlation, through a medium of equality, to reconcile any reformation, as long as the form of the Borough Repreſentation continues.——It is here Dependencies are created; it is here, where ſocieties are formed for the reciprocal comforts of life, that the ſeeds of corruption are ſown; and all the miniſterial practices of court intrigues are exerciſed with redoubled vigour.

The laws the parliament enacted to prevent briberty at elections, ſanctified into an act by the ſolemn proceedings of the Houſe, annexing pains and penalties, could not deſtroy the ſpirit of bribery, though it might divert the channel. Boroughs that pretended to be free from miniſterial influence, or any other influence but that of bribery, found ways notwithſtanding the act, to diſpoſe of themſelves to the higheſt bidder; evaſion was ſoon practiſed, and in the moſt ridiculous ſhapes. In one place, Mr. Punch, always a welcome viſitor in country towns, diſperſes money with a liberal hand among the burgeſſes; in another place, the candidate ſalutes the burgeſſes' wives with guineas in his mouth.——I am perſuaded Bribery and Boroughs will live and fall together.

If in ſome caſes Family Boroughs have any plea of juſtice in their favour, though my comprehenſion cannot conceive in idea ſuch a violation, unleſs the plea of Cuſtom, let the nation make them ſome recompence. The wiſdom of parliament has a precedent, in their com-

compoſition for the Iſle of Man; and their known liberality of the public money will feel no compulſion in the tranſaction. This muſt ſatisfy the proprietor, if he can put in his claim as ſuch; if Ambition and Power, the greateſt of Pandora's evils, can be ſatisfied. I do not enter into the minutiæ of the grievances; but I wiſh to be underſtood—that no reform can take place, unleſs the tenures of Borough Repreſentation were to be aboliſhed *in toto*. I believe if the motion was introduced in parliament, even the miniſter would not ſtart objections: if he ſubſtitutes any other mode for a temporary expediency, he will be cautious. Political intrigue on an affair of ſuch great magnitude, will be a dangerous experiment. I do not lay down my opinion; but am perſuaded that others will differ from me, and that opinions on this ſubject will vary as much as the ſeveral taſtes of men. What ſhould be conſidered chiefly reſpecting Borough Repreſentation is, Whether the oppoſition to the meaſure of Abolition proceeds from intereſted individuals, from court intrigues, or the general ſenſe of the nation. This known, will determine the merit of the opinions: it will call forth great virtue to cauſe the enquiry—an effort that would raiſe to the firſt character,

———*Monumentum ære Perennius*—
Dimidium facti, qui cæpit, habet, ſapere aude,
Incipe.——

QUALI-

QUALIFICATION AND INDEPENDENCE

OF

MEMBERS.

THAT the repreſentatives of a great people ſhould be diſtinguiſhed not only by the noble qualities of the mind, high in honour, diſtinguiſhed by abilities and undoubted integrity, but ſhould likewiſe be qualified in their properties, ſo as to place them above bribery. Why a diſtinction ſhould be made in the Qualification of County and Borough Members is unaccountable. The qualification for a county is Six Hundred Pounds a-year, and for a borough only Three Hundred. They ought at the time this diſtinction was made, in the fullneſs of wiſdom, to have paſſed a ſumptuary law for their different expences. Yet how very ſhamefully has this Qualification Act been evaded by ſelf-convicted perjury? As highly as I honour the ſenate of the nation, I honour the dignity of truth and propriety much higher. To borrow a qualification, and to be ſuffered to cloak

perjury under ſuch a deception, is an evaſion that reflects diſhonour upon the legiſlation, and deſtroys the faith of ſociety.

It will be advanced, that enforcing qualification will be ſhutting the door againſt Genius and Ability. Though I admit the fact, I deny the inference: oratory and eloquence are neceſſary qualities to maintain a bad cauſe, perhaps to defend a good cauſe. In our parliament we want honeſt hearts more than able heads; and I ſhould perceive more ſenſe in the feet of the *Pedes Senatores* than in all the flowery harangues of a declaiming demagogue. Genius and abilities have large fields; the Crown may call them to the cabinet, where they may be wanted: genius and abilities might fill the offices, and grace the court; but let the parliament have men of property, who at the ſame time that they tax their conſtituents, tax themſelves.

An expediency in the preſent form of repreſentation might have a temporary effect by fixing the qualification of every member to one Thouſand Pounds a-year, free from annuities, mortgages, or any incumbrances whatſoever. The locality of the property to be aſcertained by the high ſheriff of the county, and the title to be expoſed to the inſpection of every one. This might be a temporary relief, but by no means equal to a reform of ſtability, which requires a new model to clear the perplexity that the ſtate is involved in. On this ground they will be independent, and beyond the temptation of the bribe of a miniſter at leaſt.

The independent country members are ſuppoſed to be the pillars of the conſtitution; but I fear thoſe gentlemen who come under the denomination of Independent Country Members are not more immaculate than the penſioners on the miniſter's liſt. Luxury has made large ſtrides, and a train of followers of ſons, brothers, and kinſmen lay conſtant ſiege; and pride has a voracious appetite to gratify.

I can-

I cannot prove the ſtrength of the foregoing argument more forcibly than by introducing an example *ad rem.* Suppoſing the county of C———n to be repreſented by a man who has no qualification; ſuppoſe this man was diſtinguiſhed by no ſhining abilities, but the reverſe; by no popular aſcendency, but the reverſe;—ſuppoſe this man to pave the way for himſelf, contrived to put his patron in a goal; and by a villainous combination of infamous lawyers, being one himſelf, inthralled the whole county—would the houſe of commons take up ſuch a man's cauſe, and cenſure any one of the county that would publickly declare that this man had no qualification; and that the Houſe acted againſt the conſtitution by admitting of him? Suppoſe the ſame man han been the *inſtrumentum poteſtatis* for twenty years in tyrannizing over that county as the loweſt dependent tool; and that the inſtant he was returned member, he joined the oppoſition that overturned the old adminiſtration; and then demanded his patron's place as a reward for his apoſtacy;—could it be believed that the late virtuous Marquis would have liſtened to his ſolicitations, or that another member from the Principality would have proſtituted his fame in ſolicitations, under ſuch circumſtances, for ſuch a man?

Wales, of all the parts of the kingdom, returns the moſt independent members, whom the miniſter cannot bend; who will not ſacrifice their country to ambitious views or lucrative motives. Sir Watkin Williams Wynne, Sir Roger Moyſton, Mr. Middleton, Mr. Vaughan, Major Williams, are characters above the attempt of miniſters to tamper with.

The ſenſe of the houſe of commons I am ſatisfied is the ſame as my own, on the neceſſity of enforcing qualification; and I am perſuaded that the language I hold will be conſidered by them as the language of truth and common ſenſe. But perhaps gentlemen of more

more diſcernment than I pretend to arrogate to myſelf, may ſuggeſt that the experiment ſhould be poſtponed, until the perplexity of the times is ſomewhat qualified by the healing hand of Peace. The preſent time is a dangerous æra, and any innovation might convulſe the ſtate. Repreſentation has ſuch dangerous rocks and whirlpools to engage, that the wiſdom of Solon would ſcarcely effect a proper reform. The conſtitution wants new modelling. Extending the right of Election to the People, in my opinion, ought not to meet with oppoſition from the Friends of the Crown, for reaſons which I do not think proper to give at this inſtant.

Diſfranchiſing the Boroughs, I fear is a point that the boaſted Patriotiſm of the times will not ſhew an exertion to enforce. The intereſted individuals are powerful. Parliament will not admit of a partial reform; as no degree of equality can be modulated from a new diſtinction either in the Boroughs or landed Repreſentation.

England is divided into counties, and each county returns two members: the inequality of members in each county is not to be remedied, as a new diviſion would be impracticable; and to proportion repreſentation to the number of Freeholders in a county, it could never be aſcertained; as forty ſhillings freeholds and annuitants are uncertain, accidental, and pleaſurable tenures, eſpecially in an age when fluctuation of property is ſo general.

I have pointed out, that an attention to the qualification of members would ſerve as a temporary expediency: no change whatever can be perfect, without making this the chief ground-work.

ABRIDGING

ABRIDGING THE DURATION OF PARLIAMENT.

IT does not appear to me, that an annual or a triennial parliament was a fundamental law of the Conſtitution. The part which the people enjoyed in their legiſlative repreſentation was very inconſiderable during their annual parliaments, or original exiſtence. The balance of power in thoſe days was a contention between the kings and barons, or church and ſtate; and it was not until the Stuart family came upon the throne, that the people in parliament durſt ſtruggle with prerogative. It was then they turned the clergy out of the ſcale of government, and poſſeſſed themſelves of the third part of the conſtitution.

The commons had no ſooner eſtabliſhed themſelves in the ſenate, feeling their own ſtrength, and wanton with power, than they proved Dominion was in them: they diſlodged the nobles; they beheaded their king. The parliament, previous to this, was at the king's pleaſure; but in this period, at their own. The Triennial Act, in my opinion, did not ſecure the limitation ſo well as the ſeptennial; eſpecially as the king has ſtill the reſerve of prorogation. The ſelf-created parliament having convulſed the conſtitution, the Reſtoration brought about the old government; though the power of the people ſtill remained, which they ſhowed at the Revolution. Since that period,

the progreſſion from prerogative to popularity has entirely changed the nature of the conſtitution.

I believe it was in the reign of Charles II. that Mr. H. Neville propoſed in the houſe of commons, That a third part of a Houſe ſhould by ballot be voted out, and be incapable of being elected again for three years. I do not underſtand that this was on account of the corruption of its members, but rather to prevent an overgrown power from caballing to the prejudice of the ſtate, as it had done in the two preceding weak reigns. I do not infer that there was no bribery in former times; there certainly was, with the diſtinction of National and Private Corruption. It was ſaid that Charles II. received a bribe from France: if that was the caſe, it was a Private Corruption. It was not till Sir Robert Walpole's miniſterial reign that National Corruption took place. This man was expelled the houſe of commons for bribery, ſelf-corruption, peculation when he was ſecretary at war. He felt the forcible power of a bribe on himſelf; and therefore adopted a maxim, That every man had his price; which, when he became miniſter, he effectually proved on the ſenate as far as ſerved his turn. Every miniſter ſince his time has improved on the experiment.

During this reign the buſineſs of the nation has been the reſult of parliamentary wiſdom; but directed to ſuch points as the miniſterial influence could dictate. What I mean by parliamentary wiſdom is, that all has been done under the ſanction of parliament, by a majority of parliament which the borough members have always given the miniſter; yet the meaſures carried on were ſuch, that neither parliament nor the miniſter could account for;—at leaſt Lord Chatham ſaid, That there was a ſecret influence which counteracted his deſigns. The immaculate character of Lord Chatham ought to have purſued it to the block. I will dare to analize that miniſterial ſtar on ſome future occaſion.

My

My objection to annual parliaments reſts on the continual confuſion government would find itſelf involved in:—the buſineſs of the nation could not be carried on; one parliament would always be taken up in ſettling the affairs of the former. The advocates for abridging the duration of parliament advance, that in annual or triennial parliaments miniſters would not have ſo much time to bribe the members; nor would they find their account for a ſhorter duration. This is a vague argument; the work is done in a ſeſſion: the ſtipend for a ſeſſion is ſuppoſed to be 500l. I am perſuaded the ſhorter the duration of parliament, the higher the bribe would be. The corruption of bribery is not ſo much in the miniſter as in the repreſentative; and parliament muſt begin the reform with itſelf. The luxury of the Eaſt has poiſoned our minds, has brought about a ſtrange alienation of property. The great peculation of miniſters and placemen have oppreſſed the publick, and fixed their odium on the throne, that virtually has no power; but is an engine in their hands, which they work to their own ends. I cannot conceive any advantage that a triennial parliament would obtain in preference to a ſeptennial: it would not amount to a reform; which I think depends not in the leaſt in altering the duration.

What I contend for is only matter of opinion; and on this ſubject what any other man, or ſet of men, can ſay is no more, in deciding what only can be determined by the whole repreſentation. It is an invidious and beaten ſubject; and good and bad qualities will only be regarded according to party-ſupport.

The idea that frequent parliaments would be the means of producing a reform either by enforcing a more equal repreſentation, or rooting out the latent corruption in the conſtituents or repreſentatives, is what I cannot reconcile to my reaſon. It would anſwer the ends

of

of popular orators, gratify their ambition, and multiply perſonal piques; give bribery a fuller ſcope, and open more ſluices of corruption to poiſon the minds of the people than there are at preſent. The laſt parliament had totally loſt all favour, all confidence with their conſtituents. I think I can foretel, before the ſecond ſeſſion of this parliament is over, it will not have gained one ſtep more of credit with the people; which is a ſtrong proof that new parliaments adminiſter no phyſic to the conſtitution; and a certain proof that change of men, or even change of meaſures, will not eſtabliſh a permanent baſe, unleſs corruption is rooted from the firſt principle. When I conſider the principal eſtabliſhment of a borough, it has no principle of dignity in its connection. Monteſquieu, in his panegyric of this country, ſays, That this land, although preſerving every exiſtence of liberty, will loſe its liberty when the legiſlative power becomes more corrupt than the executive. Who will tell me that hour is not arrived? The race has been long run; and every exertion of jockeyſhip has been uſed in that rivalſhip for corruption. Shameful contention!—Every branch of the conſtitution had, and ought to have, a dignity which now is no more!

From no ſpirit of ambition, from no attachment to party, no influence of power, am I urged to offer my ſentiments. I thought the ſubjects herein examined have not been rightly underſtood by the public, therefore have intruded my thoughts, fearleſs of the critics, and vipers of detraction. Conſcious of my own rectitude, I throw myſelf on my country.

MINI-

MINISTERIAL INFLUENCE.

THERE is a wide diſtinction between the influence of a miniſter comprizing the influence of the crown, and the perſonal power of a miniſter reſpecting his own authority. The influence of the crown in theſe times is charged with bribery and corruption of parliament: this was not known nor attempted in former reigns, except in one inſtance by Gardner, in Queen Mary's reign, who had money ſent by the Emperor to bribe the parliament to gain their conſent that his ſon might wed the Queen. Since the conqueſt, the greateſt grievance complained of was the bribery and extortion of favourites, and men in high offices. Before the conqueſt, there was a ſtatute of Canutus in force, that if any judge ſhould take a fee or bribe, he ſhould forfeit his head to the king. Scarce a reign before Queen Elizabeth but produces inſtances of the attainder of ſome favourite. At the commencement of the Stuart line, Lord Treaſurer Somerſet was proſecuted by Lord Chief Juſtice Coke for bribery and extortion, and ſentence paſſed upon him by Lord Chancellor Bacon; Lord Coke was afterwards cenſured for bribery himſelf; and the Lord

Chancellor ſuffered degradation for the like ſuſpicions; by which we ſee no ſtation nor character proof againſt this enchantment.

Bribes were ſometimes covered over *de ſpontanea voluntate*; or, as the Spaniard expreſſes it, *gratuidad di guantes*.

Miniſters who made overgrown fortunes by the wanton bounty of kings, or by unlawful means, ſuch as no office ſalary, or addition of eſtabliſhed perquiſites could poſſibly attain, are certainly guilty of corruption; and although proofs at common law cannot be brought home, as was the caſe with Lord Verulam, yet parliament hath power of confiſcation; and for ſuch purpoſe hath made laws *ex poſt facto*. The Romans had a law provided againſt ſuch corruption called *repetundarum actionem*. As parliament alone, therefore, can bring ſuch delinquents and defaulters to juſtice, it is neceſſary that parliament ſhould be uncorrupt itſelf: But the misfortune is, that the miniſters are ſafe, when they make thoſe who are to be their accuſers and judges partakers in one common infamy with them.

The Petition of Right in Charles the Firſt's reign overturned the power in the Crown of levying ſhip-money, and other expediencies, by fines and unlawful demands on the ſubject; and a ſettlement on the crown ſince aboliſhed the Star-chamber court. The triumph over general warrants was the finiſhing ſtroke to the perſonal private authority of a miniſter. Lord Sheiburne has certainly gone great lengths to ſtab the vitals of the conſtitution, by offering arms to the people, without the approbation of the parliament: though it was not an order, or act of power, it was, I will take upon me to ſay, an unwarrantable act; and it was a glimpſe of virtue and good ſenſe in the country to withſtand the temptation; or a want of ſpirit, conſidering the effects of ſuch a ſtep in a neighbouring kingdom.

Private

Private ſubſcriptions for building of ſhips, or aſſiſting government by loans or benevolence, is a revival of the old leaven, and a deluſive attack on adminiſtration as well as parliament: It tends to unhinge the copula of government, to expoſe the weakneſs of public credit and parliamentary reſources—a mode ever invidious in the moſt abſolute times. What ſtock of merit the miniſter meant to lay in by this manuœvre, is beyond my comprehenſion!

Miniſterial power in former times was certainly perſonal—I will give an inſtance, by an anecdote in my own family. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Thomas Williams of Quirt, in the Iſle of Angleſea, who had ſerved in the queen's wars abroad, was ſo great a favourite with the queen, that on his wife's in-lying, the Queen ſent him an ebony cradle, a caudle cup, and coral in gold, with every thing ſuitable to the occaſion. When the Earl of Eſſex went to Ireland, he was ſuppoſed to have left a horſe with Thomas Williams: I have amongſt my family-papers a letter wrote by Thomas Williams to Secretary Burleigh, complaining that the High Sheriff had broke open his ſtable, and taken an horſe, under pretence that the ſame was the property of the Earl of Eſſex, which horſe he alledges to have bred himſelf. Burleigh returns the letter to Thomas Williams with two lines under-wrote, as follows:

" *This is to require the ſaid Sheriff to repair to London*
" *to anſwer the above complaint.*

" BURLEIGH."

This perſonal authority of Burleigh I conceive was exerciſed on the Sheriff, as being the queen's officer. Such a mandate at this time would be abſurd.

A ſtretch

A ſtretch of miniſterial authority was attempted by Lord North in granting a commiſſion to diſpoſe of the allodial property in Wales. Why he did not purſue his ſcheme, by his miniſterial influence, and bring that teſt into parliament, is to be wondered at: but the nation being embroiled in ſo many foreign troubles, I ſuppoſe that ſtep was reſerved for a future day. I muſt obſerve, that this meaſure, founded upon no ſtatute, and warranted by no precedent, ſince the Star-chamber was annulled, was a bare-faced act of tyranny.

The expediency of ſhip-money, and granting commiſſions for rating fines and compoſitions, had ſtatute laws (though obſolete) for their authority. The commiſſions run in the king's name; but iſſued from the court of Star-chamber. I find amongſt my papers the following receipt:

" *County of* Angleſea, 22*d day of* September, *in the* 7*th year of the reign of* Charles I. 1631.

" By virtue of the King's Majeſty hereof ſpecial commiſſion to me, for receiving of all ſuch compoſitions as ſhall be made to his majeſty's commiſſioners, with ſuch of his majeſty's ſubjects in the county of Angleſea, as did not attend the king's majeſty's coronation;

" I have received from Thomas Williams, Eſq. of Quirt Grange, Ten Pounds for the ſaid fine.

" STAFFORD.

The misfortune of all reigns, in all times, has been owing to the king's favourites, who, at the expence of the people's liberty, are endeavouring to ſtrengthen prerogative. We are taught to believe our king has no favourite. Wrapt up as he is in the endearments of a numerous offſpring, yet I can ſay of this reign what can be ſaid of no

no king in Europe, That there is no appeal from the miniſter to the king. The door of honour, nay of juſtice, is ſhut againſt the ſubject, unleſs opened by the miniſter; who will acknowledge no merit but what comes through parliamentary recommendation;—one of thoſe channels of bribery which the happy expediency of miniſterial influence has opened to corruption. This takes from the king the power of doing good—of doing juſtice—and of drawing forth the merit of his beſt ſubjects into action. It is the means of alienating the affections of his people; firſt provoking them to diſaffection, and then making that diſaffection an argument for new oppreſſion.

Miniſters in this reign are ſo little attentive to preſerve appearances, that they ſeem rather ſtudious to place their ſovereign in a diſadvantageous light. For example: I inſert a letter wrote by a miniſter, if a ſecretary at war can be called a miniſter, at the time that he was a favourite, at the head of the war department, which he commanded himſelf; having pronounced in the ſenate, by a happy caſt of thought, that the Britiſh army did not produce an officer adequated to be a commander in chief. It has appeared ſince, that our great officers of war have thought him too inſignificant to provoke reſentment; as I do, that he has too little dignity to command reſpect. Having ſerved upwards of twenty years as an officer, I was, by the perſecution of this ſecretary miniſter, drove to the neceſſity of quitting the army. At the commencement of the war, a noble lord, who then avowed a friendſhip for me, wiſhed I would reſume the military line. An opportunity then offering which I might avail myſelf of, I drew up a memorial, propoſing to raiſe a regiment at my own expence, to be at his majeſty's diſpoſal. I ſent it to the ſecretary of war, to lay before the king. After urging an anſwer, I received the following:

"SIR,

"I am under no difficulty in ſending you an anſwer to your memorial. His majeſty read it attentively, then aſked, If you had not ſold out. I told him you had: the king then ſaid, How can he expect to come in again? I told the king you were a gentleman of fortune, and could raiſe men. The king ſaid, I want no men.

Your obedient ſervant,

BARRINGTON."

I ſhall make no comments on the letter, only to obſerve, that certainly the propoſal could not merit ſo ungracious an anſwer; and that the ſentiments and language were undoubtedly the fabrication of the ſecretary. Majeſty is all benevolence, and can never ſtoop to inſult an individual—Majeſty, like the ſun, ſhould revive and protect what droops, by its rays, from the rude blaſts of ſportive Fortune. The ſecretary had before done me an injury; and proved the truth, which all men in his ſituation verify—*Quos læſerunt oderunt.*

That parliament is the only road to honour and preferment, is a proof that corruption has affected the vitals of the conſtitution. Miniſters for ſome years paſt have attended to no claim, no pretenſions, no juſtice, unleſs ſeconded by a member of parliament; and in the miniſter and member, it has been all party-connection and partiality. If any man ſhould preſume on expectations from his ſervices, or other well-founded claim, he is certain of having inſult added to injury for his preſumption. Injuries are often ſufferable, becauſe reparation may be made; but inſults corrode, which nor time, nor circumſtance can reconcile. When miniſters offer inſult, it is unpardonable; they ſhould

ſhould be loaded with deſerved reproach. They firſt provoke diſaffection, and then make that diſaffection a plea for their conduct.

I will introduce to the Public another inſtance, which I hope will not have the leſs weight becauſe I am an object in the caſe. A peer applied to the commander in chief for the lieutenant-governorſhip of Cheſter caſtle for me. He was referred to the miniſter, not being on ſpeaking terms with him. It was thought that I might write to Lord North myſelf on the ſubject with propriety. I informed his Lordſhip of my ſervices, and other pretenſions, and inſtantly received the following anſwer:

" Lord North preſents his compts. to Mr. Williams, he has received the honour of his letter; but as he is a ſtranger to Mr. Williams, and to his merit, he muſt beg to refer him to thoſe who are acquainted with both, for their recommendation of him."

Downing-ſtreet, Sept. 1ſt, 1779.

I muſt obſerve, that on the above occaſion the application was not made to *Lord North*, but to *the miniſter*. I wiſh not to expreſs the malevolence of reſentment; the reſerve attendant on unmerited ſufferings would forbid even this complaint, did it not point out the ſunken rocks and quick-ſands which miniſterial inſolence and patient merit might in future avoid. I ſtate to the Public plain facts; and they will ſeparate, in their judgment, the miniſter's arrogance and power—from any ambiguous inſinuations of merit in myſelf. I muſt add, that on ſhewing the above letter to a confidential friend of the noble lord, I was told that I owed it to *the Welch Farmer's Letters* wrote in defence of the allodial property in Wales.——Happy patriotiſm! happy times! when a man can ſo ſuffer.

For

For a man who has experienced the deluſions of life as I have done, I ſhall be cenſured for making a third application to a miniſter. An unheard-of, unlawful violence being committed on a large property, brought me to this town. I am here pointed at as a man educated to arms, inactive at a time when the country calls for the exertion of every arm. At the commencement of this war, I had offered to raiſe a regiment; I had likewiſe propoſed to add three hundred men to the militia of the county of Carnarvon—was refuſed. Lord North's letter had likewiſe attempted to degrade me in my own eyes;—however, when Lord Shelburne obtained the reins of government, I wrote on the moſt liberal principle to his lordſhip, wiſhing to be employed in any ſituation, that my labour ſhould be worthy of its hire; meaning, that I ſhould diſcharge any truſt with honour and integrity. His lordſhip appointed me to call at Shelburne Houſe. I went there, and found Major-General Arnold, and two other gentlemen. The miniſter walked into the room, caſt his eyes around, and honoured Mr. Arnold with his nod, and retired; then ſent in for the other gentlemen; and laſtly came to me, to apologize that a counſel was waiting, and begged to refer me to his ſecretary. Unfortunately for his candour—Lord Groſvenor came into the room. Lord Shelburne made another apology—he muſt give an audience to Lord Groſvenor. My long ſervice, my family, my property in this kingdom, I think entitled me to as much reſpect as was paid to Mr. Arnold; and if his lordſhip could find time to liſten to Lord Groſvenor, I arraign Lord Shelburne's character, as a gentleman, for his rudeneſs to me, after appointing me to his rendezvous. Having been referred to his ſecretary—Mr. Orde makes the following report:—"Lord Shelburne will alſo, I am ſure, have much pleaſure in paying ſuch attention as may be in his power to your requeſt." In a few days I received the following note from Lord Shelburne:

"Lord

" Lord Shelburne preſents his compts. to Mr. Williams, and is ſorry it is not in his power to comply with his requeſt; as his preſent engagements give him no opportunity of favouring his wiſhes."

The three letters I have advanced from miniſters, certainly negatives any merit in me. Be it ſo: by the introduction of myſelf to the public, I mean to ſtamp the character of miniſterial correſpondence, by anecdotes which will hand them down to poſterity—to ſhew the etiquette and refinement of theſe times in their native attire. If gentlemen would furniſh the Public with examples in affairs of greater magnitude, it would appear, that the ſprings of miniſterial actions are moved by the meaneſt paſſions; and that matters of the higheſt concern, nay, of the fate of empires, reſt on the ſlighteſt occaſions.

I will produce an inſtance reſpecting the American war.——I was at Boſton in the year 1768, at the time the commiſſioners of the ſtamp-act confined themſelves at Caſtle-William. At that time I carried a propoſal to Governor Barnard, That Mr. Otis, and the other gentlemen who oppoſed his adminiſtration, ſhould be brought over on conditions; that the governor would give them protection, and take them into favour; that the troubles ſhould ceaſe; and in particular, that there ſhould be no oppoſition to quartering troops in the town of Boſton.—The governor gave in anſwer, That they were not objects worthy of Government's notice; and that he would have no connection with them.——On this pivet, the American war has turned. When I left Boſton to go to New-York, I waited on the governor to receive his commands. He deſired me to tell General Gage—he ſaid he had reaſons for not writing—That if he ſent one regiment to Boſton, the town would inſiſt that they ſhould go to Caſtle-William; but if he ſent two or three regiments, he would enforce their quarters upon the town. I communicated the ſame to General Gage;

who in reply ſaid, That if Governor Barnard ſent for ſix regiments, he ſhould have them; he would not take the odium upon him: the miniſter of to-day might approve what the miniſter of to-morrow might condemn. When Governor Barnard was recalled, and Mr. Hutchinſon was intended for his ſucceſſor, I call upon Lord Hilſborough to witneſs, whether I did not wait on his lordſhip, from a duty I owed my country, and prognoſticate the American war, if Mr. Hutchinſon was appointed governor.

In a letter I had the honour of writing as commandant of St. John's Iſland, to the Earl of Shelburne, who was then miniſter, dated Fort-Amherſt, June 25. 1767, is the following abſtract:

" And further I beg to acquaint your lordſhip, that laſt winter, in a converſation with a gentleman who carries on the greateſt fiſhery in America, he gave me to underſtand, that he could lay a ſcheme before the government, much to the advantage of the fiſhery in general, and to the immediate ſettling of the Iſland of St. John; but it was of ſuch a nature as not to be divulged, unleſs he knew whether the encouragement and ſecurity would be adequate; without which, a diſcovery would prove immediate deſtruction to his preſent certainty. I urged public motives to induce him to communicate his ſcheme to the miniſtry; but his reply was, what indeed I often heard remarked, That the great men at home take great pains to encourage information from the colonies; which when obtained, advantages only ſome private favourite adventurer; and the perſon who gave the information entirely forgot.

" If, my lord, the above pointed gentleman, with a property of 30, or 40,000l. and almoſt the fiſhery of New-England under his direction, could be transferred to this iſland, I ſhould humbly think

no

no expedient ſhould be wanting to gain the acquiſition, not ſo particular to the iſland as to the fiſhing trade in general; and yet more, to plume that republican province of its moſt luxurious advantage in this manner, would be more effectual phyſic, than otherwiſe cauterizing by enforcing prerogative, or even the acts of Engliſh parliaments, which they are ſo totally repugnant to."

No notice was taken of the letter. Fifteen hundred men were employed by the above gentleman; who formed the militia of Marblehead, which were the beſt troops that engaged in the American conteſt.——Since the war broke out, I have, on many occaſions, ſent hints and information to the miniſtry; ſome with my name ſigned, and others anonymous; for all which I find I am a—PROSCRIBED MAN.

GOD SAVE THE KING.